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ABSTRACT

Teaching in the two-year college, which was once considered to be a stepping-stone to teaching at a four-year college or university, has become a unique profession in itself. In the years ahead, community colleges should be actively involved in cooperating in developing English curricula. Prospective teachers of English at two-year schools need to know grammatical principles, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure; need to be able to adjust to a variety of learning styles and teaching methods; need a good foundation in the teaching of English as a second language; and need interdisciplinary training in reading, writing, psychology, and speech. Graduate schools must expand training in the specialized area of teaching in the two-year college, following such programs as those at the University of California. (TJ)

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THE ENGLISH PROGRAM IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

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When Professor Renoir of Berkeley wrote me last summer inviting me to take part in this panel, he suggested, since I was involved in "intramural responsibilities," that I address "the immediate and long-range problems and ideal aims, as well as the solution and non-solutions that exist or fail to exist" in the English teaching program for the community college. In addition, he cited some specific questions towards which my remarks could be directed. With such a clear mandate to stay on the subject, I decided that I had better follow a written outline, so you will please forgive my reading this paper.

Because the assignment covers a rather large area, I think that a brief background of the community college and, possibly, a glimpse into the future would be helpful. Then I propose to look at each of the five questions posed and try to identify the "solution" or "non-solutions" which "exist or fail to exist."

BACKGROUND OF THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

A look at the development of this segment will help us understand the significant changes that have come about: changes in attitude toward it; changes in its mission; changes in its make-up; and changes in its fiscal support and outlook.

First, for the last twenty years, the two-year college movement has been undergoing a metamorphosis--not from frog to fair prince, but from a pre-drink Alice to a post-drink Alice in Mr. W. Rabbit's house. The movement no longer fits into its prescribed environment. There was a

time when the two-year and four-year institution had the same relationship to each other that the junior has to the senior high school. In fact, the Master Plan for Higher Education in December 1959 definitely divided the functions of the three segments as follows: the two-year colleges would have the major responsibility for lower division work and vocational education; the state university and colleges for the baccalaureate and master's program; and the University of California for the baccalaureate professional and doctoral programs, with a limited freshman enrollment.¹ In this way, a hierarchy of higher education was established. Thus, teaching in a two-year college was often regarded by the graduate job-seeker as the least attractive and most accessible rung in the academic ladder, only to be regarded seriously when he could not find a place in a four-year institution. I am reminded of the time when my brother was working for his medical degree, and, when he found the going difficult or depressing, I would console him with the comforting thought that he could always become a horse doctor. Now, both the veterinary field and the two-year college teaching field have become so highly specialized that they cannot be supplanted by related professions. Two-year college teaching is no longer a direct route to university teaching but is a unique profession in itself.

Second, the mission of the community college has undergone remarkable expansion. It is significant that the junior college has become the community college. To the lower division academic program have been added stronger emphasis upon vocational training and more service courses to meet the needs of the respective community which supports the college. I quote in part from the philosophy statement of the Board of Governors of California Community Colleges: That the community college should

"provide the opportunity for life-long learning" . . . and that "colleges are committed to provide career development, skills improvement and job retraining along with a full range of academic courses . . ." ² The mission of the two-year college has expanded into a tri-partite emphasis: academic education; vocational training; and community services.

Third, the magnitude of growth and program have really made a giant Alice of the two-year college movement. Some statistics reveal this enormous growth. In 1947, in California, 107,000 students attended 55 two-year colleges, organized largely in conjunction with high school or unified school districts. In the 1960's, colleges gradually separated from these connections and became entities of their own. ³ In 1977-78, 70 separate college districts administered 107 colleges with a student body population of 1,322,000, or 75% of the total 1,752,000 students in public higher education for the entire state. Of this total the state university and colleges enrolled 304,000, or 17%; and the University of California, 126,000, or 7%. Thus, at any given time, one out of every ten Californians eligible to attend college (18 years or over) is enrolled in a community college.

But, more significant are these figures: in Fall 1977, community colleges enrolled 88% of the 1,073,600 freshman and sophomore students enrolled in postsecondary education institutions; CSUC enrolled 8%, and UC, nearly 4%. ⁴ This would mean that the majority of third-year students enrolling in the four-year institutions are coming from the two-year sector. For example, during the 1978-79 academic year, Valley College sent 923 students to nearby Northridge State University; 17% of this group were English majors. In just the fall quarter of 1977, Valley College sent 107 students to the University of California campuses. ⁵ Using these

figures as averages, we can see that if a hundred two-year colleges sent a minimum of 100 students each to the UC system, the total would be at least 10,000 transfer students. In the case of the State University system, the projection of an average transfer rate of 500 students per college would total 50,000 students per year for the nineteen campuses.

The California Postsecondary Education Commission in its Information Digest, 1979, predicts in 1981 a total community college enrollment of 1,151,000; for the state university system, 315,000; and for the university system, 131,000, reflecting a small increase in student population. Allowing for the same rate of transfer, we can project a tremendous student movement from the two- to the four-year institutions. Furthermore, from a practical viewpoint, students are finding it both academically and economically feasible to finish their lower division work at the two-year college. In addition to these students, of course, are the thousands who enroll for goals other than that for a baccalaureate degree.

Fourth, changing fiscal support and outlook presages another tectonic displacement. At one time, the financial base of the community college was firmly rooted in local funding, with the state supplying about 28% of the total. Since the passage of Proposition 13, the tax base has shifted drastically from the local to the state, with an approximate ratio of 70% to 30%. Parallel with increasing state subsidy are increasing legislative interest and closer scrutiny of the whole area of higher education. With growing demands upon a common source of funds for public education, both the legislature and the tax payer are looking for more economical sharing of the educational tax dollar.

It behooves us then, it seems to me, that we should anticipate this inquisitorial interest and correlate our educational programs before unholy

alliances are made for us by external forces. Two instances where we may cooperate better come to my mind. One is the third-year writing proficiency testing program which has been mandated for the state university system. Since 70% of our students transfer to the system, this proficiency testing has a direct impact upon our students. Certainly, it seems to me, the community college should be involved in the development of such a testing program. Another case is the creation of a junior-level high school testing program now being developed by the University of California to be administered to college-bound high school juniors. Again, the results of this testing program will have implications for the community colleges, for I predict that the great majority who fail the test will not improve in the one year of high school remaining to them, but will come to the two-year colleges for the necessary work.

Both of these developments underline my concern that the community colleges should be actively involved in matters that concern them so vitally. On the other hand, great strides have been made toward cooperation within the English discipline. For example, the English Council of California Two-Year Colleges has been meeting since 1972, with similar English Councils of the University of California and the California State University and Colleges. In the last spring 1979 meeting, both councils passed resolutions regarding their concern for the two-year segment. The state university system recommended community college participation in their testing program, and the university group voiced their concern regarding the heavy class loads in composition classes. Another example of multi-level cooperation is the formation of the Intersegmental Committee on Writing sponsored by the California Postsecondary Education Commission. Some of you have seen the first position paper in which standards of pro-

iciency and testing programs are discussed.

Concluding this brief review on background, we have had glimpses at changes in attitude, in mission, in make-up, and in support and outlook in this highly versatile segment of postsecondary education and the total impression is one of challenge and change. Now, let us look at the questions we are to consider.

1. What must the new teacher know to meet the immediate demands of the two-year college classroom?

The first obvious answer is that he must have the specific basic skills to teach his subject. Judging from the response and performance of the student body (not necessarily poor, vari-ethnic, or handicapped), I often think that English is foreign territory to all. The new teacher must realize that he will probably be teaching basic skills courses as a major part of his load. He must, therefore, be thoroughly familiar with, and have a good grasp of such mundane elements as grammatical principles, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. Lack of these basic skills, as you Subject A teachers have realized, interferes with the student's writing skill. Lack of analytical familiarity with basic principles, as we community college teachers have realized, seriously interferes with a teacher's ability in a composition class.

Second, the teacher must realize that he is no longer teaching the traditional high school graduate, but a combination of traditional and non-traditional students, including the returning older woman, the retrainee for career increments, the older citizen, the educational opportunity grantee, and the veteran, although in reduced numbers recently. He must be able to adjust to a variety of learning styles and teaching methods to meet the needs of this heterogeneous population, whose average age is twenty-seven.

The third suggestion I would make is that the new teacher understand as much as possible the complexity of the learning process. It is often as important to know how the student learns what we teach him as it is to know what we teach him. Much experimenting has been done in this area, and I cite one example: Mina Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations in which she traces the causes of learning difficulties in writing.

2. What ought he or she have studied to be able to meet the long-range challenge of the two-year cultural responsibilities?

First, an instructor must have a master's degree in English to receive a teaching credential in English, at least in California.

Second, much as I would like to suggest in-depth study of fascinating literary subjects, I think it much more practical for the teacher to have a broad rather than a narrow specialized education. A community college instructor (if he is fortunate) may be called upon to teach a survey course in English, American, or World Literature, or a course in fiction, poetry, technical writing, or children's literature. But above all, he needs a good course in the teaching of writing, and more specifically, a good course in the teaching of basic skills.

The third suggestion I would make, and in many respects, the most indicative of a growing trend, is that he has a good foundation in the teaching of English as a Second Language. With the influx of differing ethnic groups into the two-year colleges, the teacher must realize that the teaching of this group differs drastically from that of the native American population. Demographic studies show, especially in California, that the third world population is increasing at a faster rate than that of the Anglo and that in the not-too-distant future, the population will have a non-Anglo majority. This means that ESL classes will become an

important part of English department offerings. Even if the new teacher does not teach ESL classes, he will find many students in his basic skills and composition courses coming from differing ethnic backgrounds and cultures. It would help him to have some experience or background in teaching of this group. For example, the double negative is perfectly permissible in Spanish, and oriental languages do not contain the article. This last often results in some whimsical placement, such as "I have English teacher teaching the English."

3. Would inter-disciplinary graduate programs be better than programs in a single language and literature?

With our tendency to specialize in all professions, we often forget that the student who cannot write is also the student who cannot read, and the student who has never learned to study can do neither. Graduate programs for prospective teachers would be rendering a great service if they could combine the disciplines of reading, writing, and psychology. I would also add speech if the teaching of foreign students will be involved.

Because emphasis is laid upon teaching rather than upon research and publishing, the two-year college instructor should have a broad knowledge of the humanities. Two-year colleges do not normally offer highly specialized literature courses such as an in-depth course in Chaucer or Middle English, yet knowledge of both would be helpful in the survey course on English Literature or a vocabulary-building course for reading. Again, for example, familiarity with music and art would make his explanation of the Romantic period vital and exciting, as students see parallel movements in all the humanities. I think the community college teacher of English is the closest to being the Renaissance person, for no area, in my

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experience, seems to be off-limits for questions and discussions, and it helps to be conversant in many disciplines.

4. Are the universities offering programs designed to meet these immediate needs and long-range challenges?

As chairman of a large English department in a college of 26,000 students, I have often faced bright, eager prospective instructors whose scholarship and scholastic records were impeccable, and I would reach out to them as to kindred spirits. But my heart would sink when I found them to be experts on Edmund Spenser but to have had only a semester's experience as a teaching assistant in Subject A when I needed an instructor for basic grammar skills. I tried to soften the blow by telling them they had great potential which only needed redirection.

In recent years, graduate schools have realized the need for specialized training and notable attempts have been made in this area. For example, the English Department at UCLA, in conjunction with the English Department at Pierce College, developed an instructor-training program which later became a course at UCLA under a special director who developed an intern program with local community colleges.

Another example is the UC Berkeley and San Francisco City College arrangement, whereby a successful instructor from the two-year college is hired on a part-time basis by the university to teach a graduate course at Berkeley. The practicability of this arrangement is that the university does not need to hire or retrain a department member for this position which is filled by a qualified and respected practitioner, one who is actually teaching in a community college. He is then able to place student teachers under competent, experienced instructors in the two-year colleges. Students are registered for one quarter and are required to

fulfill definite assignments and objectives. The program is in its second year at Berkeley and has proved highly successful, both in terms of teachers trained and teachers placed after completion of the course.

5. Should the relationship between university teachers and two-year college teachers be different from what it currently is?

There was a time when we all had the comfortable assurance that the top 12% of a high school graduating class would automatically qualify for freshman composition at the University of California with a few (perhaps those on athletic scholarships) needing remediation work in Subject A. In recent times, this assumption has changed dramatically, when we find that more than fifty percent of this top twelve percent need remedial work in English. This means that the preparedness distance between the high school graduate who goes to the university and those who come to the two-year colleges has narrowed considerably so that remediation is necessary at both ends of the spectrum. Although there are other factors to be considered, such as the non-traditional student at the two-year level, by and large, it means that students at both ends need the same type of help from their instructors. In this instance, community college instructors may be of help to the university teachers, for we have been teaching this level for decades, and through error and experience have developed courses and teaching methodology which have proved successful. Mastery learning, individualized writing techniques, and the development of highly sophisticated learning centers are examples.

On the other hand, university teachers have access to research on the teaching and learning process, development of psychological approaches to language learning, and studies in literature and language. Thus, the more we can come together for the exchanging of ideas and expertise, the more we

can mutually benefit. I think of a particular instance whereby we may make these exchanges without resorting to new organizations or expenditures.

Although this situation applies only to California, I do not see why it cannot expand to other states. The English Council of California Two-Year Colleges is divided into ten regions each of which usually sponsors a regional conference. Each region feeds into a particular state university or University of California branch. I would urge cooperation and interchange with these regions, for, in this way, regional concerns can be discussed and often solved.

But teaching life would indeed be dull and stultifying if all we thought of were basic skills, composition, and problems thereunto. We at the two-year level can perhaps supply practical experience and empirical methods, but you can supply us with intellectual stimulus and scholarly curiosity. In truth, we need each other, just as students with their varying degrees of ability and ambition need us both. We are all initiates in this mystique we call higher education, and together, we can seek the "solutions that exist" and shun the non-solutions that fail to exist.

Notes

- ¹ "California Coordinating Committee for Higher Education and the Master Plan," #1024, March 1966.
- ² California Community Colleges' Five Year Plan, 1976-81.
- ³ California Community Colleges' Five Year Plan, 1977-82.
- ⁴ "CCJCA Prepares Community College Fact Sheet," California Community and Junior College Association, Vol. 24, No. 6, March 1979.
- ⁵ Dr. Fred Machetanz, Coordinator of Research for Los Angeles Valley College.